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"Ce monde nouveau tant attendu, tant rêvé":

Ousmane Sembène's Vision of Post-Colonial

Francophone Africa

By

Patrick L. Day

B.A., University of Montana, 1986

Presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

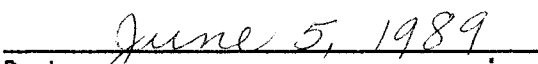
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"Ce monde nouveau tant attendu, tant rêvé: Ousmane Sembène's Vision of Post-Colonial Francophone Africa (81 pp.)

MCC

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Ousmane Sembène, a contemporary Senegalese writer and Africa's foremost filmmaker, is among a number of Francophone African authors who gained prominence as a result of the "négritude" movement of the 1940s. Following the example of the movement's founders (Léopold Sédar Senghor, Léon Damas, and Aimé Césaire), Sembène and other Francophone African writers have sought to reclaim their dignity and identity as Africans, both of which have been denied them for over three centuries of slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism.

This thesis is an examination of Sembène's fiction as it pertains to social progress in contemporary Francophone Africa. Chapter I is a historic overview of French colonial involvement in Africa and its residual influence on post-colonial Africa. Chapter II concerns the emergence of Francophone African writers both during and after the négritude movement--writers such as Senghor, Frantz Fanon, and Mariama Bâ. Chapter III presents the life and works of Ousmane Sembène, describing how his career was influenced by the négritude movement as well as the Harlem Renaissance, and how his exposure to the tenets of Marxism and his involvement in workers' unions shaped his socialist philosophy, inherent in which is Sembène's belief in the didactic component of literature. Chapter IV illustrates Sembène's criticism of racism, an issue emphasized by Sembène in the novels Le Docker noir and O Pays mon beau peuple! Chapter V describes the problem of economic oppression and exploitation as it has existed in Africa from the colonial era to the present. Once a problem traceable solely to French colonials, economic exploitation is today perpetuated by the native African bourgeoisie, which emerged in colonial Africa and has remained since African independence, as seen in the novels Les Bouts de bois de Dieu and Xala and the novella Le Mandat. The final chapter includes a discussion of the works L'Harmattan and Véhi Ciosane and explains the role of African religion and tradition in preventing Francophone Africa's social progress, in that both justify the subjugation of women, who, Sembène believes, represent Africa's future.

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Chapter I

Francophone Africa: A Historical Overview

Ousmane Sembène, a contemporary Senegalese author and filmmaker, describes the problems of colonial and post-colonial Africa and suggests solutions for the future. Thus a historical overview of the colonial history of Francophone Africa is essential to an understanding of the works and ideas of Ousmane Sembène.

France's colonization of Africa began in the 1800s, but its origins may be traced back to the seventeenth century, when the French first began purchasing slaves from Africa to work the sugar plantations in South America and the Antilles. In return for the sale of slaves, the French traders received large quantities of sugar, rum, molasses, coffee, cotton, and indigo. At that time, Louis XIV (1643-1715) established the French monarchy as Europe's dominant power, and during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Bourbon dynasty founded colonies in the Americas (Canada, Louisiana, Guiana), India (Bengal), in the West Indian islands (Guadeloupe, Martinique, Grenada, Saint-Vincent, Santa Lucia, St. Domingo), and in Africa (Senegal and Gorée), all of which served as precedents for later African colonization. By the time of the French Revolution, however, France's first

colonial Empire had been lost, due largely to the events of the Seven Years War: Canada, Senegal, and the West Indian islands of Dominica, Grenada, St. Vincent, and Tobago were lost to the British, and trade in India was confined to a few stations. In addition, Louisiana was ceded to Spain (Cobban 1985, 81). In 1830, the French invaded Algiers and after 15 years of fighting emerged victorious and immediately began encouraging settlers to claim land there; a new era of French colonial expansion in Africa was begun.

In 1848, France's second revolution took place, and the Second Republic was formed. At this time, slavery was abolished in France's colonies. Ironically, slavery had earlier been abolished in 1794 amidst French revolutionary fervor, with its promise of equal rights for all. Actually the earlier abolition was due largely to the anti-slavery movement of Christian missionaries in Africa who considered slavery to be counter to their religious ideals. Economic leaders in the French colonies also supported the movement, believing that wage labor would replace slavery. However, in 1802, Napoleon Bonaparte reinstated slavery as part of his expansionist doctrine, and it remained a part of French colonial policy until 1848.

In 1852, the Second Republic was replaced by the

Second Empire under Emperor Napoleon III (a nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte), whose colonial ventures included more expansion in Africa; in 1854, Louis Faidherbe, a captain of the naval infantry, assumed leadership of Senegal and was responsible for France's conquest of much of West Africa, most notably in the Senegal Valley and into the Western Sudan.

The turning point of French colonial involvement in Africa took place during the 1870s. In 1870, Otto von Bismarck led his German states to victory over France, and his new United German Empire included the annexed provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. In 1871, the Third French Republic was formed, and the French, who had been humiliated in the recent war and were torn by social conflict, sought revenge and glory, which were to be realized through a new policy of French imperialism. Jules Ferry and Léon Gambetta became the leading parliamentary spokesmen for French imperialism in Africa (Manning 1988, 11).

The actual history of Francophone Africa begins, however, in the 1880s, which was the period of European conquest of Africa. The conquest may be divided into two phases, the first of which began in the 1880s, which were the high point of the "diplomatic partition" of Africa, whereby European governments agreed upon how the African

continent was to be divided among themselves. The 1880s were thus a time of negotiation and military confrontation between the European and colonial governments (Manning 1988, 18).

The second phase of the conquest, the actual subjugation of Africa's inhabitants, was completed at the turn of the twentieth century, when European administrations were established to govern the African continent. However, large areas of Central and West Africa avoided regular European administration until the 1930s (Manning 1988, 18). As a result of the European conquest, Francophone Africa was organized into three great colonial units, each ruled by a governor general. French West Africa (Afrique Occidentale Française, or AOF) was comprised of the colonies from Niger to the west and had as its capital the city of Dakar. French Equatorial Africa (Afrique Equatoriale Française, or AEF) consisted of the colonies from the French Congo to Chad and had its capital at Brazzaville. The Belgian Congo was a single colony whose capital was initially at Boma and after 1920 at Leopoldville (Manning 1988, 19).

Francophone Africa's territorial composition was completed with the French, Belgian, and British conquest of the German colonies in Africa during World War I, whereby the French assumed control over Togo in 1914 and most of Cameroon in 1916, dividing these territories with

the British. Likewise, in 1917, the Belgians captured Rwanda and Burundi in German East Africa and ruled them together as Ruanda-Urundi. These new Francophone colonies became French and Belgian mandates in 1923 with the establishment of the League of Nations.

French rule was initially marked by the establishment of a uniform system of administration, which was basically autocratic, allowing Africans almost no formal say in government. The French followed the policy of direct rule, which emphasized the powers of French central government. Like the British colonial administration, the French colonial administration was based on the governing of local chiefs. However, the French were much less conscious of tribal authority than were the British and tended to undercut the power of the chief. In other words, the British exercised a policy of indirect rule in their African colonies and allowed more power to local governments. The African chief under French colonial rule was a mere agent of French administration, a sort of civil servant with little political power (Crowder 1970, 301-2). This was to change in 1956, however, when the French instituted the "loi cadre," an administrative reform which called for the dismantling of governments-general in Dakar and Brazzaville and gave more power to the governments of the individual colonies. This breaking up, or

independence of all of Francophone Africa from 1958 to 1962. Today, the following countries are recognized as comprising Francophone Africa: the Maghrebi countries of Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Mauritania, the Occidental and Central African countries of Benin (formerly Dahomey), Bourkina Fasso (formerly Upper Volta), Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, the Ivory Coast, Djibouti, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Niger, the Central African Republic, Rwanda, Senegal, Togo, and Zaire (formerly the Belgian Congo).

Although the return of African self-government in the 1960s gave Africans hope for freedom and democracy, their aspirations were met with frustration in several forms. A consideration of the nature of these situations is essential prior to an analysis of the works of Ousmane Sembène.

Economically, Africa was dominated by world forces; its relationship to the world economy had changed from one of mercantilism, in which Africans sold slaves to Europeans as workers, and then sold various goods and raw materials to Europeans, to one of an industrial capitalist relationship in which Africans sold, and continue to sell, their own labor to capitalist employers, both European and African (Manning 1988, 22). Furthermore, much of the European administrative and bureaucratic structure remains today. Historians and writers now refer to this continued European influence as "neocolonialism," for although

technically Africa is independent, it is still greatly influenced by Europe in all aspects of life--political, social, and cultural. Many African nations have suffered from political autocracy and corruption of their newly-independent governments as well.

Socially, great changes are noticeable in African society. Infant mortality has decreased and life expectancy has increased as a result of medical advances introduced by European colonizers. The family in Africa is still strong, but its concept has been altered significantly because of increased urbanization. As new economic structures were developed during the period of colonization, new social classes also emerged. The peasantry (small farmers, rural artisans, herders, fishermen, and hunters) still represents the largest social class in Francophone Africa, but with the creation of a rising wage-labor class and a growing African capitalist elite which often exploits its own people, the peasants are also the most disenfranchised class.

European technology introduced automobiles, airplanes, radio, and television, among other things, to Africa, not always with favorable results. Africans are now influenced to buy products which many of them cannot afford and/or do not need. In addition, forests have been exploited under the pressures of modernization, resulting in the loss of much arable land to erosion and causing the

scarcity of firewood which is so important to the majority of Africans. Water is also in short supply because of the existence of huge dams used to produce hydroelectricity.

Culturally, Francophone Africa is still in the process of defining itself. Most Africans are today either Christians or Muslims. The first African conversions to Islam occurred in the tenth century and by 1985 Francophone Africa was nearly 50% Muslim. Christianity has existed in Africa since the fifteenth century as a result of Italian and Portuguese missionary work. In addition to Christianity and Islam, various other indigenous religions exist in Francophone Africa, inherent in which is the animist belief in totemism and supernatural powers. African music, literature, and art have also expanded in new forms since colonization.

How then does one define the term "Francophone Africa"? Historian Patrick Manning describes it as "a cultural community defined today by language, but also by traditions of education, religion, law, politics, social and economic structure" (Manning 1988, 22). Manning notes, however, that the term "Francophone Africa" was not widely used until the 1960s when it was coined by African writers, who sought to assert their independence without denying their European cultural ties. The colonial names for Africa, "l'Afrique française" (French Africa) and

"Belgian Africa" had referred to empire rather than language (Manning 1988, 22).

Since independence, Francophone Africans have sought to define themselves socially, culturally, and politically, a task which has been, and continues to be, confusing, to say the least. For example, should the people of each nation work towards nationalism, completely independent of Europe and any other Francophone African nation? Or rather, should they accept their European colonial heritage and attempt to assimilate it while maintaining their own traditions? Or, should they adopt a broader identity and seek continental, pan-African unity? Such are the questions which Francophone African writers have confronted since African independence, as we shall see in the following chapter.

Chapter II

Aspects of Francophone African Literature

The best-known Francophone African writer is Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, who is not only a renowned poet and essayist, but a scholar and politician as well. Senghor was educated in Paris, where he met Aimé Césaire of Martinique and Léon Damas of French Guiana, both of whom were also poets, essayists, and political leaders. Shortly after World War II, the three men founded the "négritude" movement in which they celebrated the beauty and dignity of "blackness" and the eternal strength of Mother Africa. The "négritude" movement was to influence the black civil rights movement in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, as well as the Francophone African independence movement which began in the 1950s.

Senghor's poems praised African traditions, land, people, and music through complex imagery and allusion. In his poem "Femme Noire," Senghor describes with a series of sensual images his ideal of a beautiful African woman, a metaphor for Africa herself, whose beauty Senghor also contemplates. Juxtaposed with his exaltation of Africa is Senghor's poem "Seigneur Dieu" in which the poet laments Africa's deplorable conditions under French oppression, from pre-colonial slavery to post-colonial or

neocolonial influence, while at the same time asking God to forgive the French for their sins against Africa. The sentiments expressed in "Seigneur Dieu" also reflect Senghor's conciliatory political ideals--both before and after Africa had achieved its independence.

Senghor was elected to the French Constituent Assembly in 1945 before being elected president of the Republic of Senegal in 1960. His political vision was one of African socialism, in which he maintained African communal traditions and consulted with tribal chiefs, at the same time conferring with French ambassadors concerning policy decisions (Manning 1988, 156).

In addition to his literary and political achievements, Senghor founded the literary and critical journal, Présence Africaine, whose first issue appeared simultaneously in Paris and Dakar in December of 1947. Présence Africaine introduced the movement of "négritude" and became an organ for the criticism of colonialism and the rehabilitation of Africans. Aimé Césaire, also a delegate to the National Assembly, became best-known for Cahier d'un retour au pays natal (Return to my Native Land), a collection of poems recounting a voyage back to Martinique after years of education in France. In his poems, Césaire criticizes colonial rule and evokes the beauty of blackness and African traditions.

Césaire was a frequent contributor to Présence Africaine, as were French writers André Gide, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Georges Balandier.

Senghor voluntarily relinquished his presidency in 1980, choosing Abdou Diouf, his prime minister since 1970, as his successor. Senghor, it must be noted, is today a member of the prestigious "Académie française."

Following the precedent of writers such as Senghor, Césaire, Damas, and others, there emerged before and during the years of independence a wealth of Francophone African writers, all of whom attempted in some way to lend identity and direction to Africans whose past was at best undefined and whose future was so uncertain.

If Senghor's objective was one of conciliation toward and cooperation with the French, despite his own acknowledgement of the abuses of colonialism, his views were not shared by all, and certainly not by Frantz Fanon, who believed that African independence could not be realized by cooperating with colonial powers and that only a violent rebellion of the African masses would provoke a change.

Fanon was born in Martinique in 1925 and trained as a psychiatrist in France, one of the few blacks in the medical profession at the time. Sent to work in French hospitals during the Algerian war of liberation (1954-62),

Fanon decided to join the Algerians in their cause and soon became a leading theorist of peasant revolution. Fanon believed that colonialism led necessarily to violent revolution, and he considered the peasants to be its strongest fighters and most reliable supporters. Fanon's first involvement with the Algerian campaign for independence was as editor of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) newspaper. In 1961, he published Les Damnés de la terre (The Wretched of the Earth), his best-known work, which is a manifesto for a violent, peasant-led revolt of indigenous peoples against their oppressors. Fanon believed that the native African wage laborers in the cities were actually a privileged class who benefitted from good wages and were thus compromised by the colonial system. The "lumpen-proletariat," the disenfranchised peasants who lived outside the city without regular employment, had nothing to lose in rebelling against colonial power and therefore represented the only possible hope for complete independence. Furthermore, Fanon considered the national bourgeoisie (the African capitalists) to be people who made no positive economic or social contribution to society, as they were, for the most part, corrupt leaders who furthered the interests of the colonial regime and exploited their own countrymen.

Fanon's belief in violent revolutionary nationalism received both acclaim and criticism within Africa and abroad. Les Damnés de la terre was hailed by some critics as the quintessential depiction of the effects of colonialism and their solutions; for others, the book was but a vindictive diatribe against Europeans with an irresponsible call for violence. In retrospect, one sees that Fanon's view of the proletariat (the wage laborers) as a labor aristocracy is exaggerated, but his critique of the African bourgeoisie is accurate; in fact, most African nations still suffer from the corruption and exploitation of African capitalists (Manning 1988, 131).

As the fervor of independence subsided, and the new nations emerged, Francophone African writers focused increasingly on problems for which Europeans could not solely be blamed. Mariama Bâ, a Senegalese writer, criticized the Islamic faith, which condones polygamy and subjugation of women in general, in her epistolary novel Une si longue lettre (So Long a Letter), published in 1979. The novel consists of a series of letters exchanged between the main character, Ramatoulaye, and Aïssatou, her friend since childhood, both of whose husbands foresake them to marry younger women. The two women are contrasted in the lives they lead after being separated from their husbands; Ramatoulaye remains in Senegal, largely out of fear of change, limited by a society in which unmarried

women are ostracized and women in general are dependent on men for their very survival. Aïssatou, who is much more progressive, chooses to be independent, working in the United States as an interpreter in a Senegalese embassy after completing her studies in France. Although at first resigned to her life in Senegal, Ramatoulaye shows, at novel's end, signs of escaping from religious and societal oppression to claim her identity as a woman and an individual.

In addition to her criticism of Africa's regressive traditional view of women, Bâ also condemns the contemporary African bourgeoisie, in much the same fashion as Fanon. Both Ramatoulaye's and Aïssatou's husbands are members of this new class (Ramatoulaye's husband having been a union lawyer before his death, and Aïssatou's being a physician), and both take second wives for little other reason than that their financial position allows them to satisfy their desires; religious justification is a mere hypocritical convenience for both men. Thus, Bâ's novel represents a major victory not only for African feminism but for cultural and societal reform in Africa as well.

There exist numerous other examples of Francophone African writers whose works have appeared since the era of independence, but perhaps no other writer has portrayed Francophone Africa, both past and present, more thoroughly and with more insight than Senegalese author and filmmaker

Ousmane Sembène, whose life and works are presented in Chapter III.

Chapter III

The Life and Works of Ousmane Sembène

Ousmane Sembène was born on January 1, 1923 in Ziguinchor, Senegal. The son of a fisherman of Muslim extraction, Sembène spent his youth divided between his father in Casamance and his uncles, after his parents were divorced. He was greatly influenced by his mother's eldest brother, Abdou Rahmane Diop, a Mambassoum school teacher and author of writings on Islam.

Diop died in 1935 at which time Sembène traveled to Dakar to prepare for an exam (Certificat d'Etudes), which he never took, the reason for which is not completely clear. We do know that one day Sembène was struck by the principal of his school and that he retaliated in kind and was summarily expelled, never to return. Accounts of this story vary in content and severity, some scholars reporting that the confrontation was actually a fistfight, others calling it an exchange of slaps. Whatever the case, Sembène was supported in his action by his father, and the memory of the incident remained; in his second novel, O Pays mon beau peuple! (1957), we are told by one of the characters that the main character, Oumar Faye, was expelled from school for returning the slap of the

principal, who had wrongly accused him of having stolen a book. Diagne, the character recounting the incident says, "Comme Dumar se savait innocent, il a refusé la punition. Alors le directeur s'est mis à le gifler. Inutile de vous dire qu'il a été mis en sang par Faye et que Faye a été renvoyé de l'école" (Pays, 36-- Hereafter, Sembène's works will be noted with a one word title, followed by a page number).

In the years leading to World War II, Sembène practiced a number of trades, including those of mason, fisherman, and mechanic, often spending his evenings at the movies. At this time, he devoutly pursued the Muslim faith and was interested in religious mysticism, both of which he would later renounce in his fiction and films. This period also marks Sembène's first contacts with local union leaders, experiences which would later influence his belief in Marxist ideology. During his spare time, when he was not at the movies, Sembène participated in the activities of an amateur theater troupe in Senegal, and on the weekends, he would listen to "griots," who familiarized him with Africa's epic past and taught him traditional storytelling techniques. In Africa, the griot, or "gewe" as he is often called, is the traditional storyteller, responsible for the transmission of Africa's oral treasures. Through his retelling of legends, myths, epics, tales, or historical poems, the griot perpetuates

Africa's oral legacy, which is still very important today. The griot's influence has been felt in Europe and the Americas as well and was the source of Aesop's and, later, La Fontaine's fables (Pfaff 1984, 31). In 1947, Senegalese Ambassador and writer Birago Diop published Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba, a collection of traditional African fables which Diop had compiled from the stories recounted him by an African griot named Amadou Koumba; Diop in turn translated the stories into French. A second volume, Les Nouveaux Contes d'Amadou Koumba, appeared in 1958. Birago Diop is thus credited with having preserved a valuable component of African tradition and making it more widely available through his translations. Sembène would later compare his role as a writer and filmmaker to that of the griot, for while most of his works take place in modern times, their themes are often deeply rooted in African oral tradition. In the introduction to his novel, L'Harmattan (1963), Sembène discusses the importance of the griot's role in Africa and explains his own fidelity to the griot's objectives and ideals:

Je ne fais pas la théorie du roman africain. Je me souviens pourtant que jadis dans cette Afrique qui passe pour classique, le griot était, non seulement l'élément dynamique de sa tribu, clan, village, mais aussi le témoin patent de chaque événement. C'est lui qui enregistrait, déposait devant tous sous l'arbre du palabre les faits et gestes de chacun. La conception de mon travail découle de cet enseignement: reste au plus près du réel et du peuple (L'Harmattan, 10).

Sembène joined the French colonial troops in 1942 as an artillery man in the "tirailleurs sénégalais", originally a group of French West African soldiers, founded in 1820 by the French colonizers who needed support in their colonial skirmishes in Africa. The corps was eventually expanded to include soldiers from all of France's African colonies. In 1917, Blaise Diagne of Senegal, the first African member of The French National Assembly, with support from French Prime Minister Clémenceau, toured the West African colonies in search of new recruits for an expanded "tirailleurs sénégalais." Some 175,000 soldiers were recruited for World War I, most of whom were sent to Europe as support troops (Manning 1988, 67). This army served also in World War II, Vietnam, and Algeria. Sembène himself fought both in Africa and in Europe until 1946, when he was demobilized in Dakar. Then, from October, 1947 to March, 1948, he participated in the Dakar-Niger railroad workers' strike for better wages and improved working conditions. The events of the strike were the basis of Sembène's novel, Les Bouts de bois de Dieu (God's Bits of Wood), published in 1960. His involvement in political and cultural activities continued when he began work in 1948 as a longshoreman in Marseille, where he joined the "Confédération Générale du Travail" (CGT), a leftist workers' union. In addition to his union interests,

Sembène protested fervently against French colonial presence in Indochina and participated in the political and cultural activities of African students. His increasing interest in American and Caribbean writers such as Richard Wright and Claude McKay as well as his familiarity with the Harlem Renaissance led to a desire to raise African literature to the same degree of world-wide acceptance.

Sembène spent the early 1950s painting and writing poetry, and in 1956, he published his first novel, Le Docker noir (The Black Dockworker), which reflected his experiences as a worker and union member in Marseille. Le Docker noir is the story of Diaw Falla, a Senegalese dockworker in Marseille, who is sentenced to life at hard labor in prison for the accidental murder of the famous French novelist, Ginette Tontisane, who had stolen the manuscript for a novel which Falla had entrusted to her for publication. Falla is also one of the leaders of the Confédération Générale du Travail, whose members struggle for better wages and an amelioration of the abominable working conditions on the docks of Marseille. The novel is a strong criticism of racial prejudice, colonial oppression, and a justice system whose decisions are based more on the color of one's skin than on the facts presented during a trial, and although in retrospect Le Docker noir's plot concerning a purloined manuscript

seems a bit banal and its criticisms of the French lack some of the insight and subtlety of his later works, Sembène's first novel established him as a promising writer.

Sembène published his second novel, O Pays mon beau peuple! (O My Country, My Beautiful People!) in 1957; the novel's main character, Oumar Faye, returns to his native village in Senegal from Europe, following World War II, in which he fought heroically in France's colonial army. Faye's return is complicated by his marriage to Isabelle, a white French woman he met and wed while abroad. The marriage and Faye's return cause the natives of the Senegalese village to re-evaluate some of their ideas concerning the French, and the reader discovers that the African is also capable of racism. This impartial reassessment is undermined in the end, however, as Faye is brutally murdered by French colonizers as a result of his attempts at organizing the peasants and modernizing their farming techniques.

Sembène traveled extensively in the late 1950s, visiting China, North Vietnam, and the city of Tashkent in the Soviet Union, where he attended the First Congress of African and Asiatic Writers, and in 1960 he published Les Bouts de bois de Dieu, based on his participation in the Dakar-Niger railroad workers' strike. The novel's publication established Sembène as a major literary figure

as evidenced by his contacts with French writers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Paul Eluard, Louis Aragon, and Simone de Beauvoir, as well as with black writers Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and others.

In 1961, Sembène returned to his native Africa, where he realized that his written works were inaccessible to the majority of Africans who were illiterate in French. He believed that through the medium of film he would be able to present his ideas to a much greater audience, and so he returned to Paris where he met with film critics and filmmakers upon whose urging he sought financial support from the U.S.S.R., Canada, the United States, Poland, and Czechoslovakia to study filmmaking. In the meantime, he published Voltaïque (Tribal Scars), a collection of short stories.

In 1962, Sembène traveled to the U.S.S.R. to study film at Moscow's Gorki Studio under the instruction of cinematographer Mark Donskoi. During this period his literary career continued to flourish. In 1963, he published L'Harmattan, a novel which takes place in a fictitious African country and whose characters struggle for independence from France. The plot closely resembles the events surrounding a referendum proposed in 1958 by then-French President Charles De Gaulle, by which Africans voted on whether to remain under French colonial rule or to become independent. In most of the colonies, the vote

was in favor of ratifying the referendum and remaining under French rule, but in Niger, Cameroon, and Guinea there were strong opposition movements. In Guinea, an overwhelming majority voted against the referendum, and the country was granted immediate independence (Manning 1988, 149).

Sembène made a short documentary film in 1962 titled L'Empire Sonhrai (The Sonhrai Empire), which to this day has not been commercially distributed. He also released his first significant film, Borom Sarret in 1963. Although Sembène was beginning to devote most of his time to filmmaking, he continued to develop his skills as a novelist, publishing the novellas Véhi Ciosane (White Genesis) and Le Mandat (The Money Order) in 1964, both of which were honored as best works by an African writer at the First Black World Festival of Arts in Dakar in 1966. Véhi Ciosane is set in a tiny, peaceful Senegalese village, whose inhabitants are troubled when the young daughter of the village's most noble family is discovered to be pregnant. At first, an alien field worker is accused of being the father, and although he denies the accusation, he is banished from the village. When the girl's mother questions her as to the child's origins, she refuses to answer, but it becomes increasingly apparent that the girl's father is the culprit, the discovery of

mother commits suicide, and the father is killed by his son, a former soldier in the French colonial army. In the end, the young girl and her newborn child are banished from the village in ignominy for having tarnished the honor of the community.

In Le Mandat, Ibrahima Dieng, the novella's principal character, who lives with his two wives in the periphery of Dakar, receives a money order one day from his nephew, who works as a street sweeper in Paris. In his letter, the nephew asks Dieng to cash the money order, give some of the money to his mother (Dieng's sister), and put most of the money in a savings account for when he returns. In return for his assistance, Dieng is to keep some of the money for himself. Dieng, who has been unemployed for over a year, considers the money order to be the solution to his financial problems, but as the reader learns, cashing the money order is not a simple task, and Dieng is soon hopelessly engulfed in the labyrinthine bureaucratic system of Dakar. Ultimately, Dieng, disillusioned and demoralized, seeks the assistance of one of his wives' relatives, who is a powerful member of the African bourgeoisie. The man absconds with the money, however, telling Dieng that he was robbed, which leads Dieng to lament that dishonesty is the norm in today's world, and as a result, he vows to be dishonest himself.

Sembène adapted both Véhi Ciosane and Le Mandat as films; Véhi Ciosane was released as Niaye in 1964, and Le Mandat as Mandabi in 1968. In addition to these films, Sembène released La Noire de (Black Girl), based on a short story from Voltaïque, and in 1967, he served as an official judge at the Cannes Film Festival. The years 1969 to 1971 were devoted entirely to film, during which time Sembène made two films for European television stations and released the films Taw and Emitai. In 1972 his interest returned to writing, and he was instrumental in the creation of Kaddu (The Voice), a Dakar newspaper in Wolof (the language spoken by the vast majority of Senegalese) to which local writers were, and are still, encouraged to contribute articles, poems, and stories. He published the novel Xala in 1973 and adapted it as a film in 1975. In Wolof, the word "xala" denotes temporary sexual impotence, which is precisely what the main character of the novel and film, El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye, suffers shortly after marrying his third wife, a woman much younger than he. El Hadji, who was once one of his people's leaders in the African independence movement, is presently a member of the African bourgeoisie, whose members exploit and oppress the masses, who are their fellow countrymen. One of the ways in which this exploitation manifests itself is through the subjugation of women, which is the case with El Hadji who

takes a third wife for no other reason than to satisfy his caprices. On his wedding night, however, El Hadji is incapable of consummating his marriage, leading him to believe that someone has cast on him the spell of "xala." At first, he suspects his two other wives, but he eventually learns that it was a beggar who conjured the spell in response to El Hadji's having robbed his people of their land shortly after African independence. To break the spell, El Hadji must serve a penance which entails his disrobing and being spat upon by those he has scorned for so long--the dregs of society--the cripples, beggars, lepers, etc., and thus we see the African bourgeoisie, who are little more than lackeys of French economic enterprise, symbolized as impotent, both physically and spiritually.

Sembène released his most current film Ceddo in 1976, and completed his latest novel, Le Dernier de l'Empire (The Last of the Empire) in 1981. Le Dernier de l'Empire, a work in two volumes, concerns a constitutional coup d'état organized by a fictitious Senegalese president (Pfaff 1984, 183).

What is most remarkable about Ousmane Sembène is his wealth of experience at virtually all levels of existence, which is why the usual description of the man as author and filmmaker is inadequate. A more accurate portrait of Sembène would need to follow: autodidact, fisherman,

mason, dockworker, war veteran, union organizer, "griot," author, publisher, and filmmaker (producer, director, writer, and actor). Therefore, it is not surprising that many of Sembène's artistic works are semi-autobiographical in nature. It follows logically, then, that the artist is well qualified to present his audience with a complete and realistic view of African society. For example, although Sembène now belongs to a privileged class because of his artistic success, he can still sympathize with and accurately depict the plight of the peasants and the working class, for he was not so long ago one of them. When he wrote about the bitter struggle of the railroad workers to improve their lot in Les Bouts de bois de Dieu, he was able to do so realistically, because he had himself taken part in the workers' strike. Likewise, in Le Docker noir, when we read of Diaw Falla's miserable existence as a dockworker, who barely finds time to help organize his union and work on his novel because of the grueling nature of his job, it is Sembène's own experiences about which we read.

It is clear that Sembène believes the purpose of art to be didactic, and it is equally evident that his struggle to establish himself as a credible social critic was hard-fought. He has expressed his belief in the functionality of art in numerous interviews and in his fiction as well. In one such interview, he stated that

the artist's obligation is to teach his audience so that it may recognize its faults and consequently correct them:

Je n'écris pas pour plaire aux Européens.
Lorsque j'écris, je m'adresse à mon peuple
pour dire: voilà comment nous sommes. Nous
pouvons être meilleurs ou pires. Tout dépend
de nous (Herzberger-Fofana 1983, 62).

In Le Docker noir, the hero, Diaw Falla, soliloquizes that there is no use in his aspiring to become a writer if in his works he fails to support a cause of some sort:

Tu aspiras à devenir un écrivain? Tu n'en
seras jamais un bon, tant que tu ne défendras
pas une cause. Vois-tu, un écrivain doit
aller de l'avant, voir les choses dans la
réalité, ne point avoir peur de ses idées.
Personne d'autre que nous, ne saura nous
défendre (Docker, 149).

A self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist, Sembène identifies with the proletariat in its battle against the oppressive, dehumanizing forces of the bourgeois elite, and the utility of his art in exposing the abuses of the bourgeoisie forms much of his socialist ideology, yet to categorize his world view as strictly Marxist is too simple, for his criticisms are too varied to fit a purely Marxist dialectic, which will become clear through an analysis of his written works. Before doing so, however, it is useful to distinguish those works which are set during the period of European colonial domination from those whose action takes place during the era of

independence. In the novels which comprise the former category, Les Bouts de bois de Dieu and L'Harmattan, the author necessarily emphasizes the effects of colonization on the African and the impediments to independence--which were the primary concerns of the pre-independence period. In the latter case, however, the fundamental theme is that of neocolonialism, or, the legacy of the colonial era as it affects independent Africa, although Sembène gives equal attention to Africa's internal problems--those which cannot be blamed solely on colonization. The novels in this second category are Véhi Ciosane, Le Mandat, and Xala. Of course, there exists some overlapping of themes between the two divisions, but the separation helps one to keep in mind the author's perspective at the time of writing and makes clearer the evolution of his ideas from the colonial era to the present, ideas which are analyzed in the following three chapters.

Chapter IV

Racial Prejudice

Africa's copious output of literature written in European languages began in the 1950s, and, as described above, its primary motivation was the movement of "négritude", which began in the years following World War II (Gérard and Laurent 1980, 133). Because of the "négritude" movement and with African independence close at hand, African writers felt free to write anticolonial literature which denounced the European oppression which Africans had undergone since the time of the slave trade in the seventeenth century. Following the example of Léopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas, and others who helped to found the "négritude" movement, the African writers of the 1950s sought as one of their objectives the reaffirmation of the dignity of blacks, which had been denied them for so long by Europeans, who considered Africans to be inferior beings. Because these writings were revolutionary, they were oftentimes doctrinaire and aggressive in tone in their denunciation of racial prejudice. Such is the case in Sembène's first novel, Le Docker noir (1956), the author's most obvious and vehement criticism of racial prejudice to date.

The novel's principal character, Diaw Falla, works as a stevedore on the docks of Marseille by day and spends

his evenings writing and helping to organize his labor union in its struggle for adequate wages and safer, more tolerable working conditions. Falla, a Senegalese native, is an ambitious social climber who attempts to assert his identity as a man by writing, an occupation which the author contrasts with that of the dockworker, who is considered to be no better than a beast of burden:

Il [Falla] avait le choix entre deux personnages: le docker, qui n'était qu'un être animal, mais qui vivait et payait son loyer; l'intellectuel qui ne pouvait exister que dans un climat de repos, et de liberté de pensée (Docker, 134).

However, Falla's attempts at self-realization are frustrated by the famous French novelist, Ginette Tontisane, to whom Falla entrusts the manuscript of his first novel, Le Dernier voyage du négrier "Sirius", which is, symbolically, about the African slave trade. Falla later learns that Tontisane has not only published his novel under her own name, but has been awarded a prestigious literary prize for it as well. In a fit of rage, Falla unintentionally murders Tontisane, and it is during his trial that Falla realizes the injustice of the French legal system whose jury members are persuaded by the prejudiced remarks of a psychiatrist attempting to prove that Falla's actual motive was to rape Tontisane. The psychiatrist states that black men are not only predisposed to commit rape, but also possess a natural, sexual obsession with white women:

Chez les Noirs, c'est une chose naturelle, et surtout quand il s'agit d'une femme blanche. Ils sont fascinés par la blancheur de la peau qui est plus attirante que celle des négresses (Docker, 54).

Granted, Falla is guilty of murdering Tontisane, and the author does not attempt to justify Falla's crime by implying that it was merited by Tontisane, but it is evident that Falla is condemned to a life of hard labor in prison largely because of racial prejudice, which is manifested by the jury in its verdict and by the French journalists reporting the trial, who intimate that Tontisane was raped. In other words, Falla is justifiably found guilty of murder, but unfairly accused of and punished for rape, and one senses that the verdict is reached because of the color of the defendant's skin and not out of any sense of justice. One may draw parallels between Falla's fate and that of Albert Camus' character, Meursault, in L'Etranger (1957) who is convicted of murder mainly as a result of the prejudice of the jury members, who are led to believe that since Meursault's everyday comportment does not fit that which society deems "normal," he must in reality be a cold-blooded murderer, and not a man who acted in self-defense.

Henry Riou, Falla's counsel for the defense, tells the jury, frankly, that the accusations against his client

are based on his being black and on the negative connotations associated with it, stereotypes nurtured and perpetuated by the "yellow" press:

Mon client, par la seule couleur de son épiderme, semble faire la preuve de sa culpabilité; il est la brute capable de tout, le sauvage qui s'abreuve du sang de sa victime. L'accusation repose sur la haine qu'ont provoquée les journaux qui ont déformé les faits pour mieux toucher le coeur des honnêtes gens (Docker, 72).

In his own defense, Falla is requested to quote from his manuscript so as to prove that it was he who had written it, but when he does so, verbatim, the judge asks him, impertinently, how long it took him to memorize it.

As stated, the journalists at the trial are no less biased than the judge, the jury, and the prosecuting attorney; in fact, Falla's very desire to defend himself seems to be an audacious act in the eyes of one such journalist, who laments in an article that Falla is nothing like the happy, docile "Mamadou" ("Sambo") beloved of the French:

On a l'impression de se trouver devant un être n'ayant jamais subi l'influence de la civilisation. Il n'a rien du grand "Mamadou" inoffensif et candide, fort et souriant, cher à nos coeurs de bons Français (Docker, 27).

Of course, racial prejudice is not the novel's only theme. The issue of class distinction is equally important and will be discussed more thoroughly in the following chapter, but it is essential that one realize

that Falla is doubly oppressed. That is, his efforts to free himself from his miserable economic and social position by writing are nullified by Tontisane, and during his trial, when he is stripped of his dignity as a man because of his skin color, his attempts at self-realization, both economic and social, are thwarted (Feuser 1986, 112). In such a context, Falla's criminal act may be viewed as a gesture of both anti-bourgeois and racially motivated revolt (Feuser 1986, 113); shortly after the murder, as Falla walks the streets of Paris before surrendering himself to the police, he feels free for the first time, as if having undergone a catharsis, experiencing pride in his color and realizing his value as a man:

Son orgueil de Noir et sa fierté d'homme dictaient ses mouvements; avec ardeur, il se leva, fit un effort pour se considérer comme les autres qui allaient et venaient . . . Ce sentiment nouveau de sa valeur d'homme guidait ses pas, l'aida même à grimper dans le wagon (Docker, 195).

Nevertheless, despite his feelings of self-affirmation, Falla deeply regrets his crime, and one realizes that it was not premeditated. While in prison, Falla exclaims in a letter to his mother, "Diable! dans ma lucidité, je ne massacrerai pas plus une fleur qu'un être vivant!" (Docker, 209) Thus, Sembène is not advocating violence as a means of attaining justice or equality; rather, he shows that Falla's crime was provoked by the

conditions existing in colonial France, which denied its black members their racial dignity and economic equality; Henry Riou expresses this idea during the trial:

A côté de notre pays, nous avons bâti une nation peuplée d'hommes noirs, à qui nous avons enseigné notre mode de vie. Nous leur avons dit que la France était accueillante, que ses habitants les aimaient. Les paroles leur paraissent dérisoires quand ils voient la réalité. Peu à peu, les liens unissant la France et l'Afrique se sont tendus: ils sont maintenant prêts à se rompre (Docker, 73).

Sembène has been criticized for the novel's hostile, moralizing tone, as in the case of two such critics who described the novel as "an unconscionably crude story, faulty in structure and language, deprived of any verisimilitude, and oozing racial hatred, a book which had best be forgotten, except as a document for the literary history of Africa" (Gérard and Laurent 1980, 133). Is the criticism justified? To a certain extent, it is, for when one compares this first novel to Sembène's later works, one realizes that it lacks much of the restraint and subtlety that Sembène normally practices in criticizing injustice. In his defense, however, one may remark that the racial prejudice in the novel, although predominantly portrayed as a fault of the French, is also shown to exist in blacks as well, as is evidenced in the activities of the dockworkers' trade union. Only one of the union's black members, Falla's friend Alassane, is committed to radical trade unionism without regard to color

distinctions (Feuser 1986, 114). Alassane encourages his fellow black union members to side with white radicals who are fighting for the same cause and warns against the dangers of allowing racial prejudice to hinder the union's ultimate objectives:

Ne mettez pas votre couleur en cause, acceptez vos responsabilités d'aujourd'hui et celles de demain. Il y a une solution et vous refusez de la voir. Nos pires ennemis . . . c'est nous-mêmes! (Docker, 109)

Sembène seems to have realized, at least partially, that the problem of racial prejudice was not one-sided, and if Le Docker noir appears to be overly militant in its criticisms of the French, perhaps it is so because of its historical context; that is, one may argue that since the novel was written before African independence was achieved, the author's tone was understandable and, perhaps, even necessary in order to shock readers into acknowledging the abuses inherent in colonial rule.

At any rate, as the author matured, he tempered, somewhat, his views on prejudice, recognizing it equally as a serious problem of Africans, as is apparent in his second novel, O Pays mon beau peuple! As is true of most of his works, this novel is partially autobiographical.

The novel's principal character, Oumar Faye, is confronted with the problem of prejudice as it exists on both sides as he returns to his native village in

Casamance, Senegal after having served with honor in Europe in the French colonial army during World War II. Faye's experiences abroad have instilled in him an understanding of two cultures, both of whose practices and beliefs he attempts to assimilate: "Faye, sur de nombreux points, avait parfaitement assimilé les modes de pensée, les réactions des blancs, tout en ayant conservé au plus profond de lui l'héritage de son peuple" (Pays, 14). For Faye, such an understanding is essential, for while in France, he married a white woman, Isabelle, and he is forced to grapple with the reaction of Isabelle's parents to the marriage, as well as with his own parents' initially hostile reception of his new wife. Sembène reveals the fact that Africans are entirely as capable of prejudice as Europeans in describing the thoughts of Faye's mother, Rokhaya, with regard to Isabelle, whom she considers to be a "non-entity": "Pour elle [Rokhaya], Isabelle n'était pas une femme" (Pays, 30). Faye's father, a devout Muslim, also refuses to accept his son's marriage, which forces Faye to leave his family to live alone with his wife.

Little by little, however, Isabelle is accepted by Faye's family and friends, but the problem of prejudice remains throughout the novel, as Faye attempts to organize the native workers and farmers to combat colonial exploitation. Faye's efforts to establish an agricultural

cooperative which would protect the interests of the local farmers are met with resistance by the white colonials, who menace and attempt to intimidate Faye and his wife.

In the end, Faye is murdered by the whites, an act which suggests that little progress has been made in ameliorating racial relations, a conclusion which is not surprising, considering the novel's colonial context. Nevertheless, Sembène's portrayal of Oumar Faye is central to the author's hope for racial equality, for it is Faye who best understands that racial prejudice is a problem of both Africans and Europeans, and he is as harsh in his indictments of his own people as he is in his criticism of Europeans:

Il [Faye] avait beaucoup vu, beaucoup appris pendant ses années d'Europe; d'importants bouleversements s'étaient produits en lui, il en était même venu à juger sans indulgence ses frères de race: leur sectarisme, leurs préjugés de castes qui semblaient rendre illusoire toute possibilité de progrès social, leur particularisme et jusqu'à la puerilité de certaines de leurs réactions "anti-blancs" (Pays, 14, 15).

The evolution in thought is clear and dramatic--from the reactionary, doctrinaire stance taken by the author in Le Docker noir to a more open-minded analysis of the issue of prejudice in O Pays mon beau peuple! The ideas contained in the latter form the basis for Sembène's later works, all of which present the issue in a more unbiased manner. Sembène seems to have realized that real social

progress, both European and African, could be realized not by denouncing racial prejudice as a crime solely attributable to Europeans, but by exposing it as a fault of both Europeans and Africans.

Chapter V

Economic Oppression and Social Class

As historian Patrick Manning remarks in his book Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa 1880-1985, a description of class in African society is "elusive" (Manning 1988, 43). He states, for example, that the term "class" can be used to refer to obvious social groupings in traditional African society: slaves, commoners, and aristocrats, which, although not necessarily divided by differences in wealth, are very clearly characterized by their social standing and their rights in society (Manning 1988, 43).

Class can be viewed as an economically determined phenomenon when studied in the context of colonialism, however. Here, class may be divided into occupational groups according to Africa's modes of production during the colonial period. In the late nineteenth century, varying modes of production allowed for a plethora of possible classes: peasants and aristocrats for feudal Africa, slaves and their masters for slave Africa, and workers and employers for the nascent capitalist Africa. In addition to these, merchants, princes, and clerics existed (Manning 1988, 43). In such a context, the peasantry was, and still is, by far Africa's largest class. Initially, most African peasant families owned their own land, while some paid rent to landlords. They

produced their own food and sold their surplus on the market, in return buying domestic goods with their earnings. In addition to landowning peasants, there were those who worked as fishermen, artisans, and herders (Manning 1988, 43).

It is important to keep in mind that class distinctions were not absolute, and Africans often crossed class lines freely, but the fundamental concept of class in African society remains essential today, despite its changing nature. Perhaps the most dramatic changes in the class composition of Francophone Africa occurred from the time of colonization until World War II. During this period, a wage-labor class evolved, an African bourgeoisie of small-business proprietors came to exist alongside the larger European bourgeoisie, and a class of petty producers and proprietors emerged in the towns. The slave trade gradually diminished at this time, and the African aristocracy disappeared, some of its members becoming a part of the colonial bureaucracy. Kings and sovereigns were no more, but many tribal chiefs began answering to the colonial administration. As for the peasant class, it "grew as those above it and below it were pushed to the middle" (Manning 1988, 43).

A curious trend developed after African independence, a phenomenon which has been referred to as "neocolonialism" or "recolonialism". While colonial rule

itself had ended, the post-colonial influences of Western corporations and government continued to impede the economic growth and social progress of the newly independent African nations. To a certain extent this social and economic oppression was self-inflicted; that is, politically, Africans at first respected the European military as a symbol of authority more than that of the new national governments, so that when the European armies intervened in African affairs, their power was not widely contested by Africans (Manning 1988, 164).

Economically, those African countries which had been former colonies of Europe had been exposed to capitalism, and as a result, a small but powerful African bourgeoisie remained after independence. Many of its members served as intermediaries, responsible for managing European corporations.

Therefore, colonialism was replaced by "neocolonialism", for while Africans had technically achieved independence, the effects of colonial control remained, and do so today.

Sembène has devoted much of his fiction to the concept of social class in Francophone Africa, especially as it pertains to economy, and one may trace its effects from the period of colonialism up to the modern era by reading Sembène's works.

As was stated in Chapter III, Sembène is a self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist devoted to the idea of African socialism. In addition to his experience as an organizer of the communist union, the C.G.T., Sembène's travels in the Soviet Union also exposed him to the theories of Marxist ideology, and as critic Victor O. Aire points out, Sembène is the author of the first translation into Wolof of the Communist Manifesto (Aire 1977, 284).

In his fiction, Sembène divides his characters into two classes: one consists of white colonialists or indigenous black neocolonialist exploiters; the other is comprised of the black proletarians or peasants who are oppressed and exploited by the former class (Adé Djo 1980, 125). The exploiting class consists of a variety of members: the French colonial government and administration, the French capitalist bourgeoisie, the native African bourgeoisie, indigenous collaborators, and religious and tribal leaders, who are often portrayed as cooperating with the colonial government out of self-interest.

The members of the exploited class invariably belong to the working class and the peasantry, and it is these people with whom Sembène identifies and sympathizes.

True to his Marxist philosophy, Sembène's objective

is to educate those who are exploited so that they may understand more clearly the economic, political, and social forces responsible for their oppression (Aire 1977, 286). By raising the consciousness of the oppressed, Sembène hopes to encourage the workers and peasants to revolt and ultimately found a more humanistic, egalitarian society, an idea which S. Adé Ojo refers to as "le mythe communiste" (the communist myth), which he describes as:

La capacité de l'homme pour s'assurer par ses propres moyens sa survie et pour refuser toutes les forces politico-économiques empêchant son épanouissement et légitimant son exploitation ou son oppression (Adé Ojo 1980, 132).

The clearest espousal of this ideology in Sembène's fiction is his novel Les Bouts de bois de Dieu, which although published in 1960, concerns the events of the Dakar-Niger railroad workers' strike, which took place between October 10, 1947 and March 17, 1948, and in which Sembène himself was a participant. The novel is not entirely historically based; it is actually part recorded history, part myth, which is an important distinction to make in discussing Sembène's belief in literature's didactic component. That is to say, in Les Bouts de bois de Dieu, Sembène presents an actual historical event as the novel's basic plot, but he does not confine himself to portraying only real historical characters and their actions. On the contrary, by placing history in a fictional context, Sembène is free to interpret it

according to his own philosophy, thus making clearer his message to society, a concept which Victor Aïre refers to as "didactic realism" (Aïre 1977, 284). S. Adé Ojo describes the technique in the following manner:

Il reste au niveau d'un vécu perçu, senti à travers une philosophie, une idéologie ou une conception personnelle de la société et de l'homme pour créer un monde plus beau que le réel, plus idéal que le réel, plus humain que le réel. Le romancier, en se servant des matières historiques, se permet donc de se pencher sur son art créateur, ses facultés imaginatives et son idéologie personnelle (Adé Ojo 1980, 119).

Les Bouts de bois de Dieu is epic in both design and proportion. Nearly 400 pages in length, the novel contains over forty characters who are dispersed among the major cities located along the Dakar-Niger railroad line--Bamako (in Mali), Thiès, which is the railroad's administrative center, and Dakar.

The novel opens in Bamako, where we learn that the railroad workers have decided to strike in an attempt to obtain pensions, family allowances, and wages equal to those of their white counterparts. Initially, there is hope that the demands will be met, as the French colonial administrators in Thiès agree to negotiate with the African workers. However, the negotiations are sabotaged by the colonial authorities in a number of different ways; for example, the water supply in the cities is shut off, storekeepers who are supplied by the French economy are blackmailed into refusing to sell food and other goods to

the strikers' families, and several of the more influential strike leaders are induced to side with the colonial government against their own people. In fact, even some of Africa's own elected officials are guilty of collusion with the colonial authorities, a fact that African union leader Ibrahima Bakayoko expresses when the railroad's director, Monsieur Déjean, suggests that Africa's own deputies be allowed to mediate the dispute.

Bakayoko states:

Il en est parmi eux qui, avant de se faire élire, ne possédaient même pas un deuxième pantalon. Maintenant, ils ont appartement, villa, auto, compte en banque, ils sont actionnaires dans des sociétés. Qu'ont-ils de commun avec le peuple ignorant qui les a élus sans savoir ce qu'il faisait? Ils sont devenus des alliés du patronat et vous voudriez que nous portions notre différend devant eux? (Bouts, 281).

Victor Aine goes so far as to say that Sembène is referring to Léopold Senghor and Lamine-Guèye, who was elected mayor of Dakar in 1945 (Aine 1977, 288).

When negotiations prove fruitless at Thiès, the workers are forced to meet with French authorities in Dakar, but it is actually the women who provide the impetus for the march to the capital. In fact, Sembène portrays the women as the real heroes of the novel, for it is they who are responsible for obtaining food and water when there is little of either to be found, and it is they who encourage the workers to continue the strike in spite

of the impediments encountered, and it is they, ultimately, who will force the colonial authorities to capitulate after their heroic march from Thiès to Dakar, where they demand to be heard. One of the women's leaders, Penda, expresses the group's refusal to cede to the pressures of the strike:

Pour nous cette grève, c'est la possibilité d'une vie meilleure. Hier nous riions ensemble, aujourd'hui nous pleurons avec nos enfants devant nos marmites où rien ne bouillonne. Nous nous devons garder la tête haute et ne pas céder. Et demain nous allons marcher jusqu'à N'Dakarou [Dakar] (Bouts, 288).

F. Case defends this theory by showing that the women in Les Bouts de bois de Dieu succeed where the men fail. He opposes the immaturity of the men, who rely almost entirely on a single, charismatic leader (Bakayoko) to the maturity of the women, who realize from the beginning that without a collective movement their demands will never be met (Case 1981, 277). The evidence supporting the men's failure to function collectively is overwhelming. For example, the union itself is devoid of popular support as well as finances, as workers refuse to pay their dues, and several Africans, including Beaugosse and Sounkaré betray the cause altogether, but there is no major breach in the ranks of women (Case 1981, 292). Penda emerges as the leader of the women in the march to Dakar, heroically and tirelessly goading the marchers to continue on their arduous path. She is, however, shot to death by the

soldiers guarding the entrance to the city, for, according to Sembène, once the way to social transformation has been shown, the leader becomes an encumbrance, and there exists the danger of the masses becoming subordinate to an individual leader, which is why Sembène eliminates Penda in the end (Case 1981, 290). A collective revolution of the oppressed masses is central to Sembène's socialist philosophy, and for his vision of an egalitarian society to be realized, women must be liberated from their traditional roles as mothers and wives. That is not to say that tradition must be altogether abandoned; rather, that men must learn to re-evaluate women's roles, allowing women the same freedoms which they themselves enjoy. This is precisely the conclusion reached by Lahbib, one of the union secretaries, in a letter to Bakayoko following the successful march: "Le retour des marcheuses a été bien accueilli, mais les hommes ont du mal à les dompter . . . à l'avenir il faudra compter avec elles" (Bouts, 348).

Lest the importance of a collective revolution seem overstated, one must remember that Les Bouts de bois de Dieu contains over 40 characters, and that no one character emerges as hero in the end. As Kofi Anyidoho reminds us, those critics who criticize the African novel for lacking in character development are missing the point, for unlike the traditional epic's concentration on a single hero, the African novel is more likely to portray

"collective heroism" in which each individual character plays an equally important role (Anyidoho 1986, 74). The symbolism of the novel's title, God's Bits of Wood (based on an African superstition that one must count "bits of wood" rather than human beings so as not to shorten their lifespan) also hints at solidarity in that when one member of society strays from the collective "bundle of wood," the results are tragic, as Sembène shows us in the case of the traitor, Soukarré, who dies alone and is devoured by rats (Aire 1978, 78).

The people depicted in the novel are ultimately successful because they function as a group, and the women play a central role in illustrating the necessity of solidarity in the struggle. The colonial situation is accurately represented, but the historical component is somewhat fictionalized. The fact that women were important to the success of the workers' movement is accurate, even if it is doubtful that they actually led a march to Dakar. At any rate, the question is of little relevance, for as Sembène once explained, women were essential to the success of strikes in which he himself participated during the colonial era:

J'ai vécu à l'époque où les femmes se révélaient de fait les véritables piliers du mouvement. Elles "coïngaient" leur mari s'il ne participait pas à la grève, faisaient elles-mêmes le piquet et se battaient s'il fallait (Guy 1978, 120).

Furthermore, the strikers' demands were not immediately met as they are in Sembène's novel; in fact, it was five years later, after additional strikes, when the workers' requests became reality (Aire 1977, 286). Thus, in both cases we see how Sembène altered historical fact to fit his social vision.

When Francophone Africa was granted independence, its people were confronted with a new form of political, economic, and social oppression, which has become known today as "neocolonialism". "Neocolonialism", or, "recolonialism" as it is sometimes called, may be defined as the continued influence after independence of colonial powers on their former colonies. As stated, its effects may be political, social, or economic, but in the case of modern-day Francophone Africa as Sembène depicts it, the question is mainly one of social class and economic exploitation.

As was mentioned earlier, French colonialism in Africa left its former colonies with the legacy of a native bourgeois class, modeled on that of its former rulers. In addition, the era of independence saw the expansion of French transnational corporations in Africa, some examples of which are "Total" Petroleum, the automobile companies, "Peugeot" and "Renault", and Air France's subsidiary, Air Afrique (Manning 1988, 124).

Much of France's administrative and bureaucratic structure remained as well, and French is today the language of government and administration in its former colonies. In short, although Francophone Africa was technically independent in the 1960s, it remained very much dependent on and affected by France; colonialism had given way to neocolonialism.

In Sembène's fiction, especially in the novels Le Mandat and Xala, the African bourgeoisie is caustically satirized and is depicted as a class of vulgar, egoistic "arrivistes", many of whom function as lackeys of French enterprise, securing their own material well-being at the expense of the proletarian and peasant classes. Whereas during the colonial epoch class conflict existed primarily between the African proletariat and the colonial bourgeoisie (as we have just seen in Les Bouts de bois de Dieu), post-colonial class distinctions were more complex, as the African peasantry and proletariat found themselves struggling not only against the lingering economic influence of Europe, but also against a native bourgeoisie which protected the economic interests of the former colonial authorities. Sembène describes the phenomenon of neocolonialism in the following manner:

Nous ne sommes plus à l'époque où Karl Marx décrivait le capitalisme. Maintenant nous sommes à l'état suprême de l'impérialisme avec les multinationales. Les sociétés n'appartiennent pas à un seul individu. Ce sont des entreprises sans visage. En Afrique, ce que nous appelons notre

bourgeoisie, ce ne sont que des commis. On leur prête à un taux usuraire et les bourgeois compensent cela par le vol et l'exploitation de leurs propres frères et confrères (Herzberger-Fofana 1983, 57, 58).

In his book, Les Damnés de la terre, Frantz Fanon characterizes the African bourgeoisie as a class which is largely indifferent to the social and economic problems facing Africa's masses, whom the bourgeoisie, acting as an intermediary for European enterprise, mercilessly and unconscionably exploits:

Parce qu'elle n'a pas d'idées, parce qu'elle est fermée sur elle-même, coupée du peuple, minée par son incapacité congénitale à penser à l'ensemble des problèmes en fonction de la totalité de la nation, la bourgeoisie nationale va assumer le rôle de gérant des entreprises de l'Occident et pratiquement organisera son pays en lupanar de l'Europe (Fanon 1961, 99).

In Le Mandat, Sembène creates a vivid contrast between the corrupt, exploitative African bourgeoisie and the generally honest, generous lower class, one of whose members, Ibrahima Dieng, finds himself inextricably mired in the machinations of a complicated, hostile, and unjust bureaucratic system with which he is unfamiliar.

Dieng's problems begin upon his receiving a letter from his nephew, Abdou, who works as a street sweeper in Paris. Along with the letter is a money order for 25,000 C.F.A. ("colonies françaises d'Afrique", or, after 1960 "communauté financière africaine") francs, which equalled

approximately 500 French francs, or, 40 dollars in 1965, the year in which Le Mandat was published (Peters 1982, 101). Dieng is instructed to cash the money order, saving 20,000 francs for his nephew, keeping 2,000 francs for himself, and giving 3,000 francs to Abdou's mother (who is Dieng's eldest sister).

Dieng, who has been unemployed for over a year, sees the money order as a blessing, the solution to all his worries, but as he soon discovers, his problems have just begun, for Dieng, who lives on the outskirts of Dakar with his two wives, Anam and Mety, is unprepared for the web of bureaucracy awaiting him in Dakar, where he must cash the money order.

At the bank in Dakar, Dieng meets his first obstacle--a rude bank teller who impolitely informs Dieng that he must have an identification card in order to cash the money order. Having never lived in the milieu of the city, Dieng has never owned such identification, which is unnecessary in his village, and so he must go to the police station to obtain his card. His first confrontation with the city's bureaucracy is a painfully humiliating experience for Dieng, who realizes that he, and other lower class Africans like him, are utterly powerless in the face of the new national bourgeoisie. Sembène describes Dieng's experience at the bank as such:

Il sembla à Dieng qu'un air moqueur naissait aux paupières du fonctionnaire. Dieng souffrait. Une

sueur froide d'humiliation lui venait. Il sentait une morsure cruelle sur lui. Gardant le silence, en tête lui revint cette remarque qui circulait dans tout Dakar chez les petites gens: "Il ne faut pas indisposer les bureaucrates. Ils font la pluie et le beau temps"(Mandat, 128, 129).

At the police station, Dieng's situation is greatly complicated, as he discovers that in order for an identity card to be made and sent to him he must have a birth certificate, three photos of himself, and a 50 franc stamp. His frustrated quest for these items comprises most of the novella's plot, and the various ways in which Dieng's pursuit is thwarted are too numerous to describe in any detail, but Jonathan Peters calculates Dieng's final loss at about 23,000 francs; the ultimate irony is that the money order leaves Dieng and all of his relatives worse off in the end (Peters 1982, 97). However, Dieng is the worst sufferer of all; he loses his wife Mety's gold earrings, bought for 11,500 francs and pawned to the ruthless shopkeeper, Mbarka, for 2,000 francs; a check for 11,000 francs which Dieng borrows from a nephew with connections in the town hall is reduced to 6,000 francs when Dieng is obligated to pay off a bank clerk in order to cash the check; the photographer, Ambrose, takes 200 francs more for photos which Dieng never receives; in addition, Dieng's nose is broken by Ambrose's assistant when Dieng demands a refund. Dieng loses his credibility with his neighbors as well, for they expect Dieng to share with them, in the Muslim tradition, his newfound "wealth."

The epitome of bourgeois exploitation, however, is represented in one of Mety's relatives, Mbaye, a member of the new African middle class, whom Sembène describes as follows: "Mbaye était de la génération 'Nouvelle Afrique' comme on dit dans certains milieux: le prototype, mariant à la logique cartésienne le cachet arabisant et l'élan atrophié du négro-africain" (Mandat, 178). Dieng, disillusioned and demoralized, gives Mbaye power of attorney to cash the money order; Mbaye, in return, pockets the money himself, telling Dieng he was robbed and then recompenses Dieng with 5,000 francs and a sack of rice.

Thus, we see Dieng, a poor but honest and devout Muslim who, because he is ignorant of the material and bureaucratic workings of middle-class Senegal, is cruelly manipulated by practically everyone he confronts. In the end, Dieng vows to practice the same dishonesty himself: "Moi aussi, je vais me vêtir de la peau de l'hyène . . . Parce qu'il n'y a que fourberie, menterie de vrai. L'honnêteté est un délit de nos jours" (Mandat, 189). Sembène's conclusion is more optimistic than it may seem, for although Dieng pledges himself to corruption, it is the mailman--the same mailman who delivered the money order--who tells Dieng to be patient, that Dieng himself, because he is honest, will help to change mankind. And

so, in Le Mandat, we see the future amelioration of Africa's corruption embodied in the novella's protagonist, Ibrahima Dieng, who remains honest in spite of the generally dishonest nature of the bourgeoisie (Marcato 1977, 87). In the end, a woman comes begging to Dieng, who has nothing left to give, but her words make us realize that Dieng is by nature generous and upright and that he must remain so if Africa itself is to change. She says: "De la rue, on m'a dit que tu étais bon et généreux" (Mandat, 190).

If in Le Mandat Sembène concentrates on the victim of "la nouvelle bourgeoisie africaine", in Xala he scrutinizes the unsavory characteristics of the African middle class itself, the incarnation of which is the novel's main character, El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye, who, as we learn at the beginning of the story, has just been elected president of Senegal's Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The event is significant, for El Hadji is the first Senegalese president in the history of the Chamber, which is considered to be one of the last bulwarks of French colonial rule in Africa. Initially, the reader is led to believe that El Hadji's success represents a positive transition for Africans--from the colonial era in which El Hadji's being named president would have been unthinkable, to post-colonial Africa in which Africans are realizing their independence:

Jamais, dans le passé de ce pays, le Sénégal, la Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie n'avait été dirigée par un Africain. Pour la première fois, un Sénégalais occupait le siège de Président. Cette victoire était la leur. Pendant dix ans, des hommes entreprenants avaient lutté pour arracher à leurs adversaires ce dernier bastion de l'ère coloniale (Xala, 7).

The first sign that El Hadji's victory is illusory appears early in the novel, when, upon taking a young, attractive third wife, he is unable to consummate the marriage; El Hadji is informed by a close associate that the spell of "xala" (a Wolof word meaning temporary sexual impotence) has been visited upon him. As Ogunjimi Bayo explains, according to Wolof tradition, "'Xala' can be experienced by any man, rich or poor. It can occur as a result of aggressive jealousy or rivalry; it can be the consequence of a vice or something else" (Bayo 1985, 129).

At first, El Hadji believes the spell to have been cast by one of his first two wives out of jealousy for his third marriage, but as the novel progresses, El Hadji finds that this is not the case, but not before having spent large sums of money consulting with "marabouts" (Muslim spiritual authorities credited with magical powers) to find both the cause of and cure for the curse. His financial burden is exacerbated by his obligation to three wives and eleven children, and as he becomes increasingly obsessed with finding a cure for his "xala," he neglects his duties as president of the Chamber and is mercilessly ousted by his fellow members.

Ironically, in pleading his own case before his partners, El Hadji attacks his fellow "hommes d'affaires," characterizing them as simple intermediaries of French enterprise, mere replacements for the former colonizers who continue to prosper at the expense of the masses whom the African bourgeoisie exploits, and although he does not yet realize it, El Hadji's complicity as president of the Chamber is the real reason for his "xala." El Hadji depicts the African bourgeoisie in the following manner:

Nous sommes des culs-terreux! Les banques appartiennent à qui? Les assurances? Les usines? Les entreprises? Le commerce en gros? Les cinémas? Les librairies? Les hôtels? etc., etc., etc. De tout cela et autres choses nous ne contrôlons rien. Ici, nous ne sommes que des crabes dans un panier. Nous voulons la place de l'ex-occupant. Nous y sommes. Cette Chambre en est la preuve. Quoi de changé, en général comme en particulier? Rien. Le colon est devenu plus fort, plus puissant, caché en nous, en nous ici présents . . . Et nous? . . . Culs-terreux, commissionaires, sous-traitants, par fatuité nous nous disons "Hommes d'affaires". Des affairistes sans fonds (Xala, 139).

El Hadji's bankruptcy, his being refused loans to repay his debts, and his lack of support from his own colleagues, illustrate what Fanon considers to be the social and mental psychology of the African middle class whose members would abandon one of their own as easily as they would exploit the masses if it meant furthering their own financial interests (Bayo 1985, 133).

Despite his tirade against his colleagues, El Hadji is no better than his partners, and we quickly recognize the speech as little more than self-serving demagoguery,

for El Hadji remains unchanged. He is still the same materialistic, manipulative man that he was in the beginning, and it is near the end of the novel that we learn the real cause of his "xala." El Hadji, one of the leaders in the African independence movement, used his power and position to expropriate the land belonging to his tribe shortly after independence was achieved. By forging the names of tribal members, and through the complicity of higher-ups, he appropriated the land for himself and sold it to secure his fortune. It is one of the city's beggars who reminds El Hadji of his past and who informs him of the cause of the spell cast upon him. It is this same beggar, once a member of El Hadji's tribe, who identifies himself as the author of the curse and who proffers a cure:

Pour te guérir, tu vas te mettre nu, tout nu, El Hadji. Nu devant nous tous. Et chacun de nous te crachera dessus trois fois. Tu as la clef de ta guérison. Décide-toi. Je peux te le dire maintenant, je suis celui qui t'a "noué l'aiguillette" (Xala, 167).

Thus, El Hadji must be debased by the poor who were debased by him; through the "collective fetishism" of spitting on their enemy, the masses assert their cultural beliefs and reduce El Hadji to the level of the proletarian and peasant classes from whom he has profited for so long (Harrow 1980, 187).

In the end, we see the victory of Fanon's

of African society--the poor, the sick, the mentally ill, etc., whose revolt against the middle class represents, according to both Fanon and Sembène, the only hope for African socialism and the amelioration of Africa in general:

Ces chômeurs et ces sous-hommes se réhabilitent vis-à-vis d'eux-mêmes et vis-à-vis de l'histoire. Les prostituées elles aussi, les bonnes à 2000 francs, les désespérées, tous ceux et toutes celles qui évoluent entre la folie et le suicide vont se rééquilibrer, vont se remettre en marche et participer de façon décisive à la grande procession de la nation réveillée (Fanon 1961, 80).

As Adrien Huannou points out, El Hadji is characteristic of the new African bourgeoisie which confuses nationalism with personal ambition. That is, in striving to assert themselves as powerful members of newly independent African society, the middle class loses sight of its initial intentions in fighting for independence and ends up replacing the colonial power as oppressors (Huannou 1977, 146). In Xala, this phenomenon is described as such: ". . . un sentiment nationaliste auquel ne manquait pas quelque rêve d'embourgeoisement" (Xala, 8).

Ultimately, the middle class finds that it cannot completely reconcile the two worlds through which it survives vicariously, one being the European-based capitalist system upon which the middle class depends and

the other being the African masses, the exploitation of whom is central in maintaining European support. El Hadji, a product of both European and African cultures, discovers too late that he cannot live in two worlds:

El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye était, si on peut dire, la synthèse de deux cultures. Formation bourgeoise européenne, éducation féodale africaine. Il savait, comme ses pairs, se servir adroitement de ses deux pôles. La fusion n'était pas encore complète (Xala, 11).

And so, after sacrificing the African tradition of communal will for his self-serving materialism, El Hadji is ultimately held accountable to the African collective, and as Martin Bestman maintains, Sembène's inclusion of the traditional superstition of "xala" serves to symbolize the political impotence of the African middle class in its failure to satisfy the needs of the masses (Bestman 1978, 46).

Furthermore, El Hadji's sexual impotence may be linked to his subjugation of women, which is not to say that the Muslim practice of polygamy (the Koran allows a man to have as many as four wives at once) necessarily entails subjugating women; rather, that El Hadji takes a third wife not out of any sense of following religious tradition, but as a means of satisfying his caprices, both sexual and material. In the world of the African bourgeoisie, having more than one wife is oftentimes a sign of position and wealth; in such a context, the woman

new automobile or house, a means of appearing wealthy and important, a fact which Sembène describes as such:

"...avec le peu de ce que les multinationales leur laissent comme subsides, ils [the middle class] se sentent tenus de prendre une ou deux femmes pour paraître" (Herzberger-Fofana, 58). Sembène goes so far as to suggest that the male members of the African middle class sense their political impotence, and in so doing, compensate for it by oppressing women: "Leur impuissance politique, les bourgeois la retournent contre la femme" (Herzberger-Fofana 1983, 57).

The subject of polygamy and women's roles in African society will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter, but it is clear that El Hadji's vulgar need to maintain appearances eventually leads to his disgrace, so great is his desire to maintain his social standing: "Il [El Hadji] devait maintenir son grand train de vie, son standing: trois villas, le parc automobile, ses femmes, enfants, domestiques et les employés" (Xala, 81).

If Ibrahima Dieng may be regarded as the hapless representative of the exploited masses in Francophone Africa, then El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye is undoubtedly the epitome of the African bourgeoisie. Juxtaposing Le Mandat and Xala reinforces Sembène's Marxist philosophy if one considers Dieng's failure to be the result of an individual engaging in a futile struggle against the

generally dishonest but powerful African bourgeoisie with its complex and convoluted bureaucracy; that is, Dieng's ultimate failure can be credited to the fact that he receives no support from his fellow villagers, and thus, his struggle is doomed to failure from the start. It is, according to Sembène, only through a collective revolt of the proletarian and peasant classes that a victory over the middle class will be achieved and the inception of a more just, socialist Africa based on the social and economic equality of all its members shall be realized.

The workers' strike in Les Bouts de bois de Dieu and the collective rebellion in Xala succeed precisely because of the mutual cooperation of the oppressed, whereas in Le Mandat we learn that Dieng's individual effort is inefficacious, perhaps because it verges on the individualistic ideology of the middle class itself. It is only when the individual realizes that his latent ability to transform society must be exercised in a collective context that any change may occur, a realization which Kester Echemin calls "la cohérence mythique":

Désormais l'optimisme de l'individu se fond dans celui de la collectivité. Le peuple devient une force unie. Il ressent les causes fondamentales de son angoisse, et met tout en oeuvre pour surmonter ses problèmes (Echemin 1978, 56)

In the last chapter, we will explore the roles of women, religion, and tradition as viewed by Sembène.

Chapter VI

Religion, Tradition, and the Role of Women

We have seen how European influence has been responsible for many of Francophone Africa's problems, both past and present, but to imply that all of the impediments to Francophone Africa's social progress are European-caused would be incorrect and unjust. Sembène himself acknowledges that in order for Africa to progress socially, its people must strive to correct its internal problems--problems which, Sembène believes, are linked to African religion and tradition.

As was stated earlier, Sembène was once a devout Muslim, which is not surprising, given the background of his upbringing, but it is equally important to know that he is today an atheist. Although generally hostile to religion in his written works, Sembène seems nonetheless to respect those who are religious; his views on religion are more than likely rooted in Marxist thought, for Sembène has referred to religion as an "opiate" (as Marx himself did) in both interviews and in his fiction, believing that its effect is to dull its followers into a passive, fatalistic acceptance of oppression. In one such interview, the author states:

Je respecte tous les croyants mais je pense que tous [sic] les religions sont des opiums. Je suis marxiste et athée. Au temps du colonialisme, il est arrivé que les religions servent de refuge contre l'oppression et de résistance (Guy 1978, 119).

Sembène's comments are borne out in his portrayal of Dieng in Le Mandat, who is resigned to his misfortune, because he believes it to have been willed by his god, Allah: "Le coup de poing reçu au nez était une atte Yallah: une volonté de Dieu. L'argent perdu aussi. Il était écrit que ce n'était pas lui qui le dépenserait pensait-il" (Mandat, 166). Because Ibrahima Dieng sees his fate as willed by Allah, he believes himself powerless to rebel against his oppressors and force a change. Likewise, in Xala, El Hadji's first wife, Adja Awa Astou, although she resents her husband's taking a second and third wife, is determined to forego her feelings in favor of maintaining her devout belief in the tenets of Islam, which require her obedience and submission to her husband as well as her acceptance of polygamy: "Elle [Adja] voulait être une épouse selon les canons de l'Islam: les cinq prières par jour, l'obéissance totale à son mari" (Xala, 39). Obviously, Sembène does not consider Adja's servility a virtue, for, as Kenneth Harrow remarks, from a Marxist perspective, the Muslim religion at its worst serves simply as an instrument of men to oppress women (Harrow 1980, 179), an idea which will be elaborated upon later. Sembène's stance on religion, however, is clearly illustrated in his fiction: as long as Africans believe that their oppression is divinely foreordained, they will not actively seek to overcome it.

Furthermore, the hope for a place in the paradise of the afterlife promised by religion seems to be greater than the desire to ameliorate one's lot on Earth:

Le paradis d'Allah, comme un clou planté au centre de leur cerveau, pierre angulaire de toute leur activité au jour le jour, amoindrissait, ébréçait la vive imagination pour l'avenir. Ils en étaient à cet état où ils ne sentaient plus le désir et où ils s'enfermaient avec ce vieil adage: "La vie n'est rien" (Véhi, 23).

The ability of the colonial or post-colonial powers to play on the beliefs of the masses accounts for their success in subjugating their victims, a belief echoed by Frantz Fanon:

Par le fatalisme, toute initiative est enlevée à l'opprimeur, la cause des maux, de la misère, du destin revenant à Dieu. L'individu accepte ainsi la dissolution décidée par Dieu, s'aplatit devant le colon et devant le sort et, par une sorte de rééquilibration intérieure, accède à une sérénité de pierre (Fanon 1961, 20).

We have already seen how El Hadji, a religious leader, uses the tenets of Islam as a pretext for satisfying his bourgeois desires by taking a third wife in Xala, and as such, his character is central to a discussion of the role of women in Francophone Africa, who oftentimes find themselves to be the victims of subjugation as justified by religion.

Kathleen McCaffrey refers to the subjugation of the African woman as "dual colonization." There exists, she explains, the phenomenon of "interior colonization" of

religion. In addition, the African woman suffers from the historical, or, "exterior" colonization which her male counterparts have also suffered through nearly four centuries of slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism. In other words, the African woman has fought not only to overcome the oppressive forces of slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism against which all Africans, regardless of sex, have struggled, but she must also try to triumph over her "interior" colonization as a woman in a paternalistic society (McCaffrey 1980, 77,78).

McCaffrey goes on to say that women have always been the mainstay of agriculture in Africa and that many, as traders, have had exclusive control over their goods and capital. However, since the advent of colonialism, the woman's economic role has been largely ignored or misunderstood, because women have been alienated from the means of production by foreign powers, such as the United States and France. As a result, the African woman has lost any influence she may have once had in making political or economic decisions. Only when Africa itself is freed from the elements of foreign oppression will women be able to reassert themselves as men's equals (McCaffrey 1980, 84).

One must also remember the role which Islam plays in perpetuating female subjugation. The question remains,

however, whether Islam may be considered as an outside influence or as an aspect of African tradition. In fact, Islam falls under both categories, for although it is not indigenous to Africa, Islam has existed on the continent for centuries and is thus very much a part of African tradition. Whatever the case, Islam, along with colonial and neocolonial influence, has been responsible for female oppression in Africa--a fact which Sembène illustrates throughout his fiction.

For example, in Les Bouts de bois de Dieu, women are primarily limited to the traditional roles of wife and homemaker and initially have little say in the events of the strike, which is not to say that these roles merit denigration; on the contrary, it has already been established that the female characters in the novel are responsible for supporting their families during a time of crisis and are thus credited with much of the strike's success. However, the women's right to participate in the actual events of the strike is hard-fought, and it is only when the men fail in their negotiations that the women are finally able to assert themselves. In other words, it is only because of the extraordinary events of the strike that women are allowed to participate in the politics which affect their lives. It has been shown how Penda, in the end, is given a voice before her male counterparts, but her freedom is not without a price; for example, Penda

has made a conscious choice not to marry, a decision which she regards as her right, an assertion of her freedom as a woman, but in African society an unmarried woman is oftentimes considered in the same terms as a prostitute (Scharfman 1983, 140). Such a statement may seem exaggerated, but not if one considers how the women in Les Bouts de bois de Dieu view Penda: "Elles disent qu'il n'y avait que le chemin de fer qui ne lui était pas passé dessus" (Bouts, 342). The fact that Penda is unmarried is not understood by others as a basic freedom of choice (as it would be for a man), but rather as a deviation from the traditional role of the African woman who, if she remains unmarried, or even if she is married but unable to bear children, is castigated by society, a fact stated directly by Sembène in O Pays mon beau peuple!:

Dans un pays où la stérilité est bannie, une femme ne peut vivre sans rejeton parmi ses rivales. Dans plusieurs cas, le divorce est exigé, la dot rendue et la honte rejaillit sur la famille (Pays, 22, 23).

As previously mentioned, inextricably linked to tradition is the function of the Muslim religion in denying the African woman her equality. By instilling in a woman the belief that her husband is her master after Allah, Islam requires a woman's complete submission to the will of her spouse. In Véhi Ciosane, Ngone War Thiandum is denied the right to express her sorrow and outrage at the discovery of the incestuous relationship between her

own husband and their young daughter, so devout is her belief in Islam. Throughout the novel, Ngoné is torn between the need to speak out and her belief in a religion which denies her the very right to do so:

Comme toutes les femmes d'ici, Ngoné War Thiandum figurait dans cette société alimentée de sentences, de conseils de sagesse, de recommandations de docilité passive: la femme ceci; la femme cela, fidélité, attachement sans borne, soumission totale corps et âme, afin que l'époux-maître après Yallah intercède en sa faveur pour une place au paradis. La femme s'en trouvait dans le rôle auditrice. On ne lui donnait jamais--hormis les travaux domestiques--l'occasion de formuler son point de vue, d'émettre son opinion. Elle devait écouter, appliquer ce que son mari disait (Véhi, 31).

In the end, so great is Ngoné's anguish, that she commits suicide, unable to resolve her conflict.

In addition to Islam's imposed submission is the fact that the Koran allows a man to have as many as four wives at a time, and even though a Muslim usually adds wives for financial reasons (that is, to work crops, trade their goods as merchants, or in order to produce more children who may also help the family survive financially), in practice this is not always the case, as we have seen in Xala (Linkhorn 1986, 71). In such a case, women are treated as mere possessions, and there often exists a rivalry among the wives, who must struggle to provide for their own and their children's subsistence.

Sembène is vehemently opposed to polygamy, which he views as an anachronistic social and religious phenomenon

which hinders Africa's evolution and progress. In O Pays mon beau peuple!, Agnès lashes out at one of her male companions for his support of polygamy:

La polygamie a existé dans toutes les nations. Mais vous, tant que vous ne considérerez pas la femme comme un être humain et non comme un instrument de vos viles passions, vous piétinerez. Les femmes constituent la majeure partie du peuple. Il n'y a pas de plus puissant obstacle en ce qui concerne l'évolution (Pays, 98).

In Les bouts de bois de Dieu, one of the points of contention between the strikers and the railroad authorities concerns the workers' demands for higher family allocations, which the authorities refuse on the grounds that they should not be held responsible for paying additional sums to those who have more than one wife, and thus, Sembène may be implying that Africans have created their own problem by maintaining the practice of polygamy (Linkhorn 1986, 71).

Nevertheless, as harsh as Sembène's indictments are, they must not be construed as a call for a total rejection of African religion and tradition. Sembène recognizes the value of both in shaping Africa's future, but just as he warns against accepting the negative aspects of outside influence, so too does he caution his people against regressing into religious and social customs which are opposed to his vision of Africa's progress:

Si nous voulons, nous, Africains du XX^e siècle, vivre la vie de nos ancêtres, nous régressons.

Il est bon de connaître son passé, d'en extraire des valeurs; mais le revivre, c'est se condamner soi-même (Emitai 1977, 91).

Sembène thus advocates a re-examination and re-evaluation of tradition and religion, especially concerning women, who, Sembène believes, represent Africa's future. Throughout Sembène's fiction, women (specifically young women) embody the ideals which the author envisions in Africa's future (Linkhorn 1986, 69). In Les Bouts de bois de Dieu, Bakayoko's adopted daughter, Ad'jibid'ji, is the first of her sex to attend union meetings, and although she is only eight years old, she is very much socially and politically conscious. She believes, as does Bakayoko, that one day women will be considered as men's equals; she tells one of her elders: "Petit père [Bakayoko] dit que demain femmes et hommes seront tous pareils" (Bouts, 157). At the same time, however, Ad'jibid'ji is respectful of her elders, her grandmother Niakoro in particular, which suggests that the young girl represents a synthesis of the traditional virtues and knowledge instilled in her by Niakoro and the militant feminist ideals taught her by Bakayoko, both of which Sembène considers to be essential to Africa's future amelioration; and as several scholars have commented, it is perhaps not coincidental that the novel's first chapter is titled "Ad'jibid'ji."

In Xala, El Hadji's eldest daughter, Rama, is portrayed as a dynamic, liberated revolutionary. She resents and opposes her father's polygamic existence as well as his bourgeois standing, and, contrary to tradition, she chooses her own fiancé. She views the French language as an element of France's neocolonial oppression and insists on speaking only Wolof with her peers and family. In short, Rama, having been born and raised in the tumultuous years leading to Africa's independence, continues to fight for those ideals which her father has long since foresaken in his efforts to entrench himself in the bourgeois milieu:

Cette fille [Rama] avait grandi dans le tourbillon de la lutte pour l'indépendance, lorsque son père militait avec ses compères pour la liberté de tous. Elle avait participé aux batailles des rues, aux affichages nocturnes. Membre des associations démocratiques, entrée à l'université, avec l'évolution, elle faisait partie du groupe de langue wolof. Ce troisième mariage de son père l'avait surprise et déçue (Xala, 25).

In L'Harmattan, one also remarks the presence of a young, independent, politically active female in the character of Tioumbé, who struggles in Africa's battle for independence, despite her father's violent opposition to her ideals.

In Véhi Ciosane the future Africa dreamed of by Sembène is personified by a female child born of an incestuous relationship. The child's name, Véhi Ciosane, which translates as "White Genesis", is symbolic of the

emerging Africa, which will be born or renewed out of the shame of the past, an idea expressed by the author in his introduction:

Pour toi, VEHI CIOSANE, NGONE WAR THIANDUM . . .
 puisses-tu préparer la genèse de notre monde nouveau.
 Car c'est des tares d'un vieux monde, condamné, que
 naîtra ce monde nouveau tant attendu, tant rêvé
 (Vehi, 17).

In short, Sembène's feminist philosophy is clear: for Africa to truly liberate itself from foreign oppression, women must be granted sexual equality. Being doubly oppressed by the elements of neocolonialism and by the roles established by religion and tradition, African women have the most to gain from Africa's evolution. As Sembène himself once stated: "L'Afrique, pour son développement équilibré, a besoin des bras de tous ses fils sans distinction de sexe" (Akoua 1976, 119).

Once again, Sembène does not advocate a complete rejection of tradition or religion, but he cautions that both must be re-examined (especially in relation to the role of women) in order to determine in what ways they hinder Africa's betterment. Likewise, European influence must be re-evaluated in order to arrive at an understanding of those aspects which may be incorporated to Africa's advantage as well as those which must be rejected as detrimental.

Conclusion

As one may conclude after reading this thesis, the Africa of the future envisioned by Ousmane Sembène is somewhat utopian. After all, a world in which everyone is free from oppression as it exists in all its forms (as a product of racial prejudice as well as economic, social, and sexual inequality) must be considered as a distant objective, especially given Africa's present-day problems.

In reading Sembène's fiction, one becomes immediately aware of the formidable obstacles to progress faced by Africans in the twentieth century. During the colonial era, racial prejudice and unrest were of primary concern to Africans, and Sembène's Le Docker noir and O Pays mon beau peuple! are characteristic of the militant anti-colonial Francophone literature spawned by the "négritude" movement of the 1940s. Sembène's openly hostile tone in Le Docker noir showed little of the author's insight, which would emerge in O Pays mon beau peuple!, in which Sembène concludes that the problem of racial prejudice is universal and that both Africans and French must acknowledge it as such if any real social progress is to be realized.

Along with the dilemma of prejudice, Sembène's works indicate that Africans must also attempt to overcome

economic oppression and exploitation as well as the negative aspects of social class distinctions--problems hinted at in Sembène's first two novels and expanded upon in Les Bouts de bois de Dieu, Le Mandat, and Xala. In the latter three works especially, Sembène's conclusion is clear and follows his fundamentally Marxist ideology: in order for Africans to surmount social or economic exploitation and oppression, they must revolt as a mass collective against their oppressors. In fact, Sembène's belief in African socialism is inherent in virtually all his fiction, as characterized by Diaw Falla's union activities in Le Docker noir and Oumar Faye's attempts at establishing an agricultural collective in O Pays mon beau peuple! Whether the masses are rebelling against colonial exploiters as is the case in Les Bouts de bois de Dieu and in L'Harmattan or whether they attempt to overthrow the neocolonial African bourgeoisie as in Xala, Fanon's "lumpenproletariat" represent, according to Sembène, the only real hope for Africa's future. There is no role for the self-seeking individual in Sembène's world, as is made painfully clear by Ibrahima Dieng's misfortunes in Le Mandat as well as El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye's troubles in Xala.

Equally evident in Sembène's fiction is the importance of women in Africa's collective movement, and the author is thus uncompromising in his belief that

Africa's betterment hinges on sexual equality, which explains Sembène's inclusion of strong, educated, socially and politically involved young women characters in his works. The women's march on Dakar in Les Bouts de bois de Dieu is indicative of the writer's advocacy of female liberation, as are the activities and beliefs of Penda, Ad'jibid'ji, Tioumbé (in L'Harmattan), and Rama (in Xala). These young women are symbolic of Africa itself, for if Africa is to be truly liberated from the forces of outside oppression, African women must first be liberated within their own society so that they may actively participate in the social and political events affecting their continent.

However, according to Sembène, for African women to achieve sexual equality, African religion and tradition must be re-examined to determine in which ways they may serve to hinder progress. The Muslim practice of polygamy and its inevitable result--the subjugation of women--is, according to Sembène, a tremendous impediment to Africa's future development. No less detrimental is religion's function as an "opiate," which, in some cases, lulls its followers into a fatalistic resignation to the troubles facing Africa today; Dieng's passive acceptance of bourgeois injustice in Le Mandat is just such an example, as is Adja Awa Astou's acquiescence to El Hadji's neglect in Xala.

Sembène's criticisms of African religion and

tradition, albeit vehement, are nonetheless tempered by his belief in and respect for certain valuable elements of both. That is, he realizes the importance of religious faith and tradition in defining Africa's character, which is why he does not suggest that Africans abandon either, but rather that both be scrutinized so that their negative elements (especially with regard to the role of women) may be eliminated.

Ousmane Sembène is undoubtedly in search of a utopian Africa, but his humanistic dream of a world free from injustice, in which all men and women are equal socially, economically, and politically, should not be criticized on the grounds that it is not immediately realizable given Africa's present realities. After all, Sembène is not so naive as to believe that his goals will be achieved in the near future. Nevertheless, Sembène's purpose is a didactic one, whereby he must remain involved and enlighten his people, through the media of literature and film, concerning the problems inherent in twentieth-century Africa. Through his art "engagé", Ousmane Sembène proposes solutions which may one day allow Africans to live in a world for and of which they have waited and dreamed--the world "tant attendu, tant rêvé" of Ousmane Sembène.

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